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Wednesday
October 8, 2003



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The News-Herald

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Wed. edit: Humbug Marsh

The saga of the development once planned for Humbug Marsh had been going on for so long that it's still hard to believe it's over.

Yet that is indeed finally the case with last month's ruling by a U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge against Made In Detroit Inc., causing the sale of the 400 acres of land to the Trust for Public Land. And since the trust plans to turn it over eventually to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, thus preventing any development from taking place, opponents of the project have plenty of reason to rejoice.

Perhaps the most visible of those opponents is U.S. Rep. John Dingell (D-15th District), a near-legendary figure Downriver and in Washington, D.C., who grew up hunting on the Humbug land and has been a major force in the years-long process to halt the MID project.

But while the congressman certainly deserves credit for all his work in helping to block the project, we'd like to point out here that there's plenty of credit to go around.

Since the planned development was announced, thousands of people have gotten involved to oppose it. Some are longtime environmental activists who might have been expected to immerse themselves in something like this.

The list includes folks like John Hartig of the Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative, Patricia

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Hartig, the Michigan Environmental Council, Bruce Jones, Don Griffin, Blair McGowan, George Mans, Jeanine Ansley, state Rep. Kathleen Law (D-Gibraltar), Sam Washington and the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Andy Buchsbaum and the National Wildlife Foundation, the Sierra Club, Detroit Audubon, Ducks Unlimited, Ford Motor Co. and the C.S. Mott Foundation.

And Michigan's Department of Natural Resources deserves special credit for its role early in the process, as it publicly took to task another state agency, the Department of Environmental Quality. It's no small understatement to say that doesn't happen every day.

Also deserving special mention is the Army Corps of Engineers-Detroit District, which held its ground under tremendous pressure and scrutiny.

But it was the sustained, grass-roots efforts of many people, including lots who had never gotten politically involved in anything before this, that really kept up the pressure, even at times when it looked like MID might prevail. Many of these people banded together to form the Friends of the Detroit River, a group that through this process developed some real political clout and now has moved on to defending other environmental causes.

It was people like these who helped draw Dingell's attention to their cause, and backed him as he went ahead with his portion of the battle, who are the unsung — to this point — heroes of this saga.

We live in a time when it seems that developers can go about implementing "progress" pretty much unchecked, regardless of the location and the potential impact on nature. For that reason, it's heartening to know that people can ask more not only of public officials, but also themselves, and channel their outrage into a unified chorus of voices.

We'd like to say congratulations and thank you to all those who banded together to save something that's better off left alone. They have earned the enduring gratitude of the many species of wildlife that call the marsh home — not to mention future generations of humans.

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